TRANSIT for Livable Communities

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March 7, 2012

Comments to:	Metropolitan Council, Committee of the Whole
Regarding:	Regional Development Framework
Submitted by:	Transit for Livable Communities
	Barbara Thoman, Executive Director

Thank you for this opportunity to offer our ideas on the revision of the Regional Framework.

Who are we? Transit for Livable Communities conducts research, education, and organizing to increase transportation options. We manage the federal program, Bike Walk Twin Cities, which has greatly expanded the network of routes and programs to make bicycling and walking safe and convenient options. We have a membership of 10,000.

Trends and challenges.

You will be writing a new Development Framework under changing social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Let's paint a brief picture of the current moment - Rising gasoline prices, long commutes, and a reduction in household incomes continue to squeeze family budgets. We have a growing senior population, a more multi-ethnic population, and large millennial generation with different assumptions about the good life.

Falling property values and growing costs for infrastructure maintenance are stressing local government budgets. The gap between rich and poor is widening and the average low-income household in the Twin Cities spends more on transportation than housing.

A fundamental shift from the last 70 years is occurring. Total car travel in Minnesota is flat—and people are riding transit, sharing rides, and bicycling far more often. I was one of a dozen commuters who didn't get a seat on my crowded bus this morning.

These trends speak directly to the Regional Development Framework, raising questions about how government can best maintain the infrastructure in place today and how we will provide wider access to transportation options. Options that can reduce costs for households and employers, reduce the flow of dollars we export to other states/countries, and contribute to a vibrant, healthy, and competitive region.

We suggest to you three key strategies for the new Framework.

Strategy #1: Be specific and measure results.

The current plan is extremely general, with a dizzying number of strategies but few specifics and little accountability. The current Framework calls for growth in centers, but then never defines or identifies them. Sadly, it also called for 70 percent of population growth and nearly 50 percent of job growth at the edge of the region – in the so called developing area.

A previous Council member told me that this lack of specificity came from the Council's fear of picking winner and losers. The tragedy is that we all lost by this lack of specificity when costly low density growth was scattered all over the region – most of it accessible only by driving.

The New Framework should identify priority growth areas -- suburban downtowns, regional centers, LRT station areas, main streets, bus transit stations. It should ID them on a map -- and ID the percent of growth that will ideally occur in those locations. Denver's Metro Vision targets 50 percent of new housing and 75 percent of new jobs in clearly defined centers. Salt Lake City, Seattle and other regions have similar specific plans.

Once the New Framework identifies high priority growth areas, the new Transportation Policy Plan should take things one step further. It should map out the investments needed to make those developments work best – the local road network, the sidewalk and trail connections, and so forth.

A previous Council report showed that our region could save $2 billion in infrastructure costs through more compact development in centers and along a larger network of transit, bicycle and walking routes. In addition, households will save on gasoline, vehicle costs, and parking – hundreds of millions of dollars per year. In this economy these saving are essential.

The regional benchmarks are the best thing in the current plan and should be updated and refined with metrics that best capture progress toward the new regional vision. While performance measurement is a big topic, we suggest starting with HUD's Regional Sustainability Plan metrics – things like decreasing per capita VMT and increasing the percentage of low income households with transit access to employment centers.

Strategy #2: Align transportation and land use investments.

The Council has several major funding sources that can help local units of government, new employers, and the region achieve more equitable and cost effective growth.

Federal transportation funding to the Council totals about $75 million each year. For too long, this funding allocated by TAB has subsidized growth at the edge of the region. We applaud Bill Hargis, chair of TAB, and Council leadership for deciding to rewrite the funding criteria from the ground up.

We would not be alone in aligning this funding with a region's development plan. For over a decade, Portland Metro has spent a significant amount of its federal money on regional transportation priorities and ensured that the local projects funded with this federal money are consistent with that region's 2040 Vision.

It's also critical that MnDOT investments are consistent with the regional vision, as they are in places like Salt Lake City. A new vision of compact growth won't succeed if MnDOT is prioritizing growth at new interchanges and subsidizing the longest commutes by adding lanes to our already large highway system.

Ideally, you would align all of our regional investments, including those for transportation, housing, sewers and parks.

Strategy #3: Sell the vision and provide new tools.

Focusing growth in identified centers makes sense but it can't happen without expanded transit and better connections by bicycling and walking. Without these transportation options, new growth means more traffic and people hate traffic. Too many good developments have died because of fears of future traffic headaches.

We ask the Council and our Governor to make the case for accelerating the development of a complete network of bus and rail and better connections by bicycle and walking. I was recently in Los Angeles and saw what our competition is doing. With the help of a third voter-approved ½ cent regional sales tax for transit and local projects, LA County is turning a city of 10 lane freeways into a city of transit options.

We think new tools are in order to make the case for this New Vision. Could the Council put advertising on buses (like we did for our Bike Walk Move campaign)? How about a down loadable video on regional growth? How about a banner on the Met Council headquarters?

How about additional tools and technical assistance for communities and neighborhoods? In our work with Bike Walk Twin Cities we see a need for community training on how to engage the public about controversial projects. Communities need help implementing best practices in off and on street parking. They want to know how to measure rates of bicycling and walking. TLC and other non-profits can partner with the Council to provide these tools.

While it won't be easy to get nearly 200 local units of government to embrace a new vision, we believe that the people are with you. The recent Chamber of Commerce poll found that nearly 70 percent of respondents want to ride transit more. These numbers are consistent with national polling. There is a 1,500 person waiting list for senior housing at one location along Central Corridor and we have documented a 52 percent increase in bicycling since 2007. It really is a new day.

Closing.

To summarize we suggested three main themes: Be specific and measure results, align investments, and sell the vision and provide new tools.

We appreciate your work to create a more equitable, affordable, competitive, place to live and protect the natural resources that attract so many of us to this region.

We look forward to working with you.

BICYCLING, WALKING & TRANSIT CONTINUE TO TREND UPWARD

52% **18%**

Bicycling and Walking increased in Minneapolis from 2007 to 2011

3.5%

Metro Transit provided 81 million rides in 2011

Sources: Bike Walk Twin Cities 2011 Measurement Counts, Metro Transit

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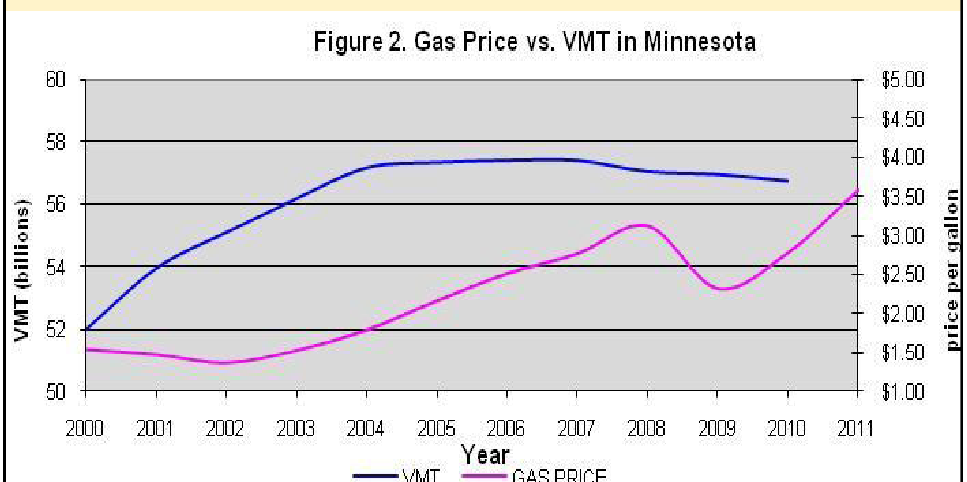
DRIVING CONTINUES TO DECLINE



Source: "Vehicle Miles of Travel: Trends in MN: 1992 to 2010", published by MnDOT Office of Transportation Data and Analysis, October 2011

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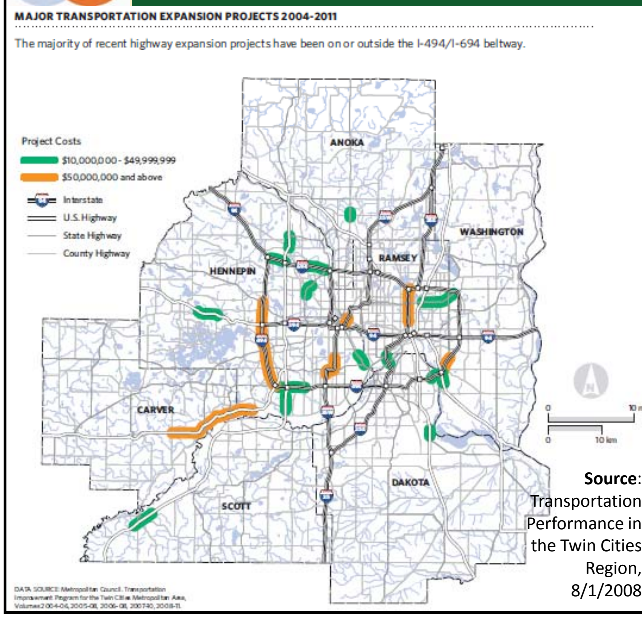
AN EXTENSIVE SYSTEM OF HIGHWAYS



Source: Transportation Performance in the Twin Cities Region, 8/1/2008

The Twin Cities has more lane miles per capita than Los Angeles.

The emphasis on road-building has not always aligned with other regional investments.

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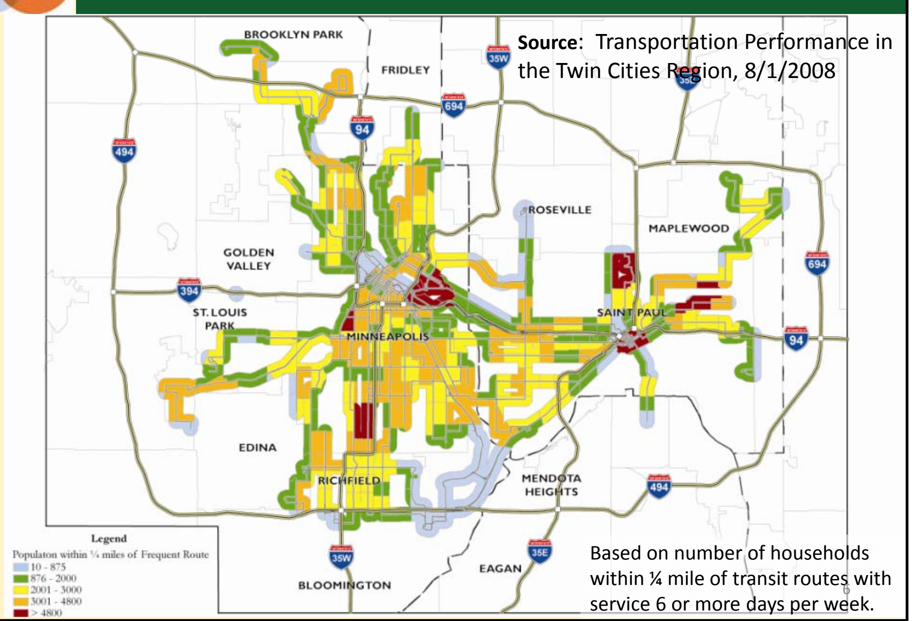
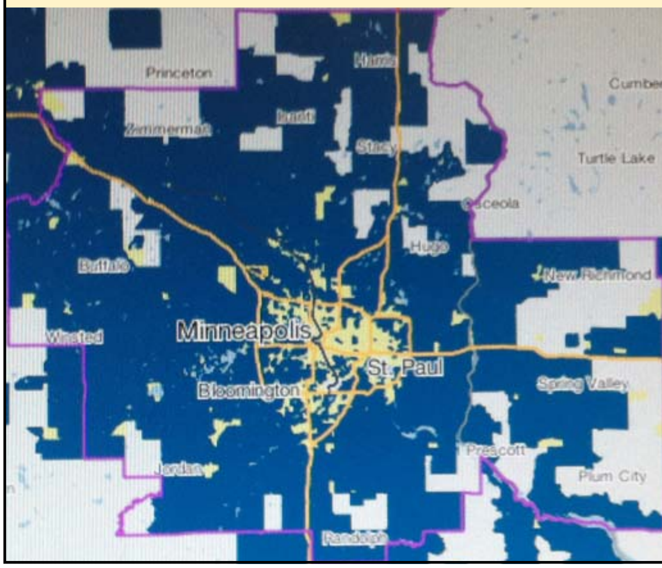
ONLY 25% OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE CONVENIENT ACCESS TO TRANSIT



Source: Transportation Performance in the Twin Cities Region, 8/1/2008

Based on number of households within ¼ mile of transit routes with service 6 or more days per week.

HOUSING + TRANSPORTATION COSTS ARE HIGH FOR MOST HOUSEHOLDS



The *Center for Neighborhood Technology* identifies areas where housing + transportation costs exceed 45% of the annual household budget.

The sprawling development pattern places a burden on many household budgets.

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REDUCE VMT = $1B SAVINGS (ANNUALLY)

EXAMPLE REGIONAL POLICY GOAL

reduce VMT per capita by 1,000 miles annually

1,000 miles
x $0.55 IRS reimbursement rate
$550 savings per person

$550 savings per person
x 1.82 million commuters
$1,001,000,000 total savings

CEO's for Cities, Joe Cortright uses this straightforward estimate of household savings.

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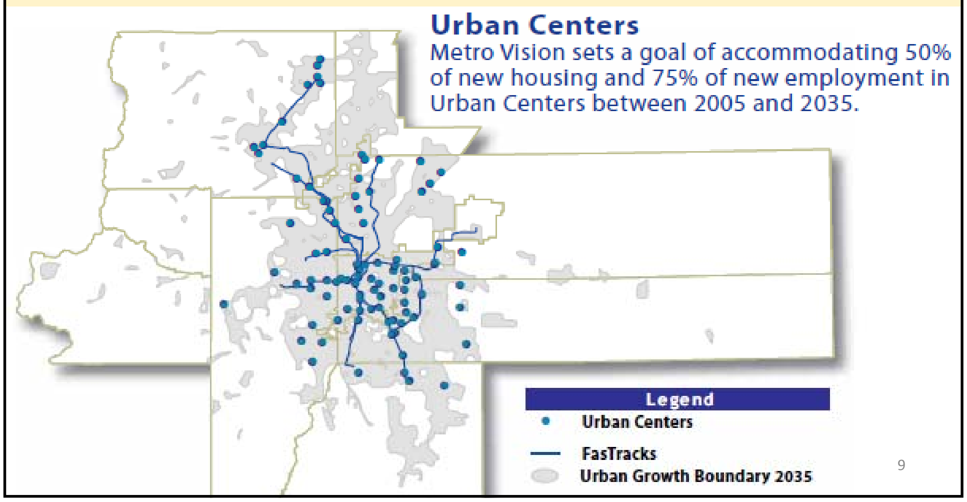
STRATEGY 1: IDENTIFY SPECIFIC GOALS…

Denver is one of several peer regions that identifies development boundaries, priority growth nodes, and specific goals for new housing and new job growth.



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STRATEGY 1: … AND MEASURE RESULTS

U.S. HUD identifies mandatory outcomes of sustainability plans. They are specific and measureable. They include:

- Decrease per capita vehicle miles travelled (VMT)
- Decrease overall combined housing + transportation costs per household
- Increase infill development, with minimal displacement
- Increase percentage of low-income households with access to major employment centers via 30-minute transit commute

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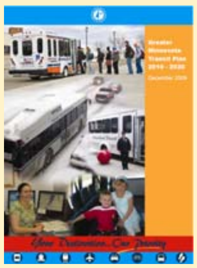
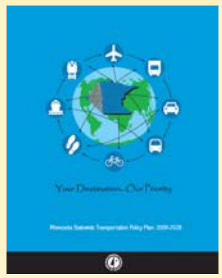
STRATEGY 2: ALIGN TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE INVESTMENTS

Are public investments aligned when planning is conducted by two agencies with different scope & different missions?

Minnesota Department of Transportation

Metropolitan Council





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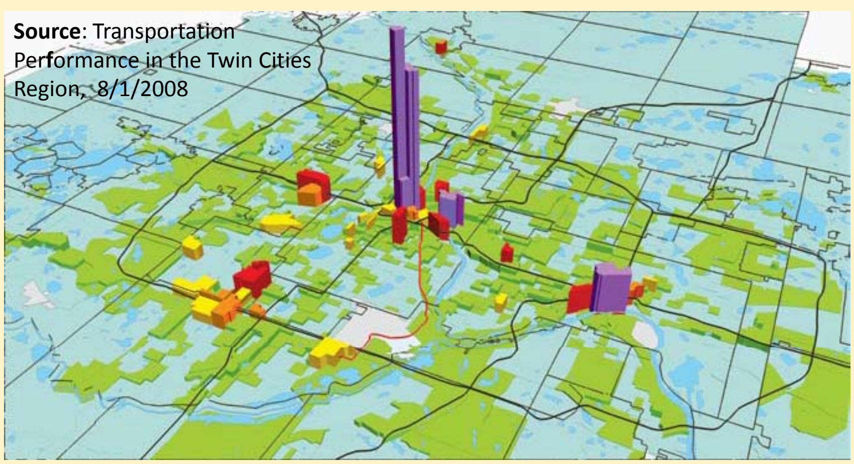
STRATEGY 2: ALIGN TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE INVESTMENTS



Source: Transportation Performance in the Twin Cities Region, 8/1/2008

In the past, jobs were clustered in commercial nodes while new housing was directed toward the edges of the region.

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STRATEGY 2: ALIGN TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE INVESTMENTS

The region's goal to double bus <u>service</u> (not ridership only) is stymied by declining operating funds & budget cuts.

Funding for transit must be greatly enhanced in order to achieve goals of new jobs and housing along transitways.

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STRATEGY 3: SET A BOLD VISION & PROVIDE NEW TOOLS

1. Enlist MnDOT as true planning partner (e.g., Wasatch Choices 2040, Salt Lake City).
2. Engage cities and counties early so that there are not winners and losers.
3. Create new models for sincere and <u>meaningful</u> public engagement (e.g., Trusted Advocate Program).
4. Plan for the future we want rather than what we wind up with!
5. Act boldly. Be visionary.

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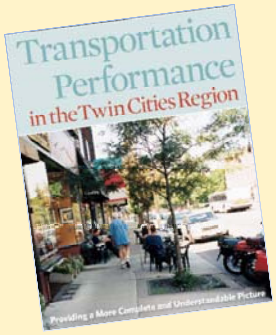
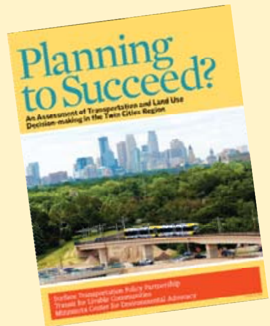
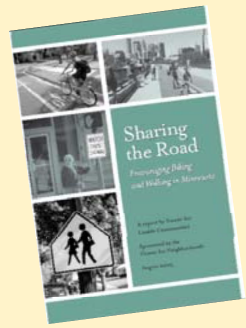
TRANSIT
for Livable Communities

Our Mission Transform Minnesota's transportation system to strengthen communities, improve opportunity and health for all people, foster a sound economy, and protect our natural resources.







More Resources found at: www.tlcminnesota.org/resources

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